

Stoics: Background

Early Stoics

- **Zeno of Citium (ca. 333 BC – 262 BC)**
- **Cleanthes (ca. 330 BC – 230 BC)**
- **Chrysippus (ca. 280 BC – 208 BC)**

Middle Stoics

- **Posidonius (ca 135 BC – 51 BC)**

Late Stoics (Roman Stoics)

- **Seneca (4BC – 65 AD)**
- **Epictetus (ca. 55 AD – 135 AD)**
- **Marcus Aurelius (121 AD – 180 AD)**

God, Mind, Fate and Zeus

- The world is not chaotic or random, but ordered.
- “God and mind and fate and Zeus are one thing, but called by many different names.” (DL pg.366)
- “God is an animal, immortal, rational, perfect in happiness, immune to everything bad, providentially [looking after] the cosmos and the things in the cosmos; but he is not anthropomorphic. [God] is the craftsman of the universe and as it were a father of all things, both in general and also that part of him which extends through everything; he is called by many names in accordance with its powers.” (DL., pg. 368)
- “Chrysippus says, in his *On Fate*, that everything happens by fate..... Fate is a continuous string of causes of things which exist, or a rational principle according to which the cosmos is managed.” (DL., pg. 368)

Freedom and Determinism

- If everything happens by fate, then are our actions determined?
- “Since there were two opinions of the older philosophers, one belonging to those men who believed that everything occurred by fate in such a way that the fate in question brought to bear the force of necessity (this was the view of Democritus, Heraclitus, Empedocles and Aristotle), the other of those who held that there were voluntary motions of the mind without fate, Chrysippus, it seems to me, wanted to strike a middle path, like an informal arbitrator, but attached himself more to the group which wanted the motions of the mind to be free of necessity. But while employing his own terms he slipped into such difficulties that he wound up unwillingly confirming the necessity of fate.” (Cicero, pg. 384)
- But what does this “middle path” mean? Perhaps what we can take from the passage is that Chrysippus sought to make both determinism and freedom compatible.

“Depends on Us”

- **The Ancients thought that in order to have freedom or moral responsibility, an action had to “depend on us” or “in our power”.**
- **Critics of the Stoics argued that the Stoic system could not maintain that actions were in our power, thus agents do not have moral responsibility according to the Stoic system.**
- **In order to understand the argument against the Stoics, we need to understand a few Stoic concepts:**
- **Fate Principle (FP): Everything that happens, happens by fate.**
- **Two types of Impressions**
 1. Theoretical Impressions
 2. Impulsive Impressions

Some Stoic Concepts

Theoretical Impressions:

- External object causes an impression → a proposition forms (*axioma*) → if we assent to the proposition → Belief

Impulsive Impressions:

- External object causes an impression → a proposition forms → if we assent to the proposition → Impulse → Action

Note: Impulsive impressions reveal whether something is desirable or should be avoided. Although impressions arise from the external world, people will have different impressions from the same external object depending on the person's particular mental disposition or character. So, an impression is partly from an external object and partly from the state of one's soul. If one is a Stoic sage, then one will always perceive impressions the right way, but non-sages will not.

E.g., Cigarettes

The Argument against the Stoic view of fate and moral responsibility: The Impulsive Impression Argument

They [the critic(s) of Chrysippus] argued as follows: (1) 'If all things come about through fate, all things come about through an antecedent cause. (2) And if impulses do this, so do the things which are consequent upon impulse; therefore so do acts of assent. (3) But if the cause of impulse is not located in us, neither is impulse itself in our power. (4) If that is so, not even the results of impulse are in our power. (5) Therefore neither acts of assent nor actions are in our power. (6) The result is that neither commendations nor reproofs nor honors nor punishments are fair.' (7) Since this argument is unsound, (8) they think it is a plausible inference that not all events come about through fate. (Cicero, pg.384)

Note:

- Given our discussion of Stoic Concepts, it seems that Cicero has mixed up terms; the argument makes sense when we replace 'impulse' with 'impulsive impression'. With this modification and a few supplemented premises (to make the argument valid), we get the following argument.**

The Impulsive Impression Argument

- (P1) If the fate principle is true, then all things happen through an antecedent cause (1)
- (P2) [If all things happen through an antecedent cause, then the impulsive impressions happen through antecedent causes.] (supplemented premise)
- (P3) If impulsive impressions happen through antecedent causes, then all things that are consequent to impulsive impressions [assent, impulse, actions] happen through antecedent causes. (2)
- (P4) [The antecedent cause of the impulsive impression (i.e. the external object) is not in our power.] (supplemented premise)
- (P5) If the antecedent cause of an impulsive impression is not in our power, then the impulsive impression is not in our power. (3)
- (P6) If both the impulsive impression is not in our power, and the impulsive impression is the antecedent cause of assent (and action), then both assent and action is not in our power. (4-5)
- (P7) But if assent and action are not in our power, then neither reproofs, nor praise, nor punishments are just. (6)
- (P8) But it is not the case that neither reproofs nor blame, nor honors, nor punishments are just. (7)

So, (C) It is not the case that the fate principle is true.

Causal Responsibility Principle

The Stoic critic is appealing to what I will call “the causal responsibility principle” (CRP):

CRP: If something, X, is causally responsible for Y, and X is not in our power, then Y is also not in our power.

If fate is causally responsible for an antecedent cause for an impulsive impression, and fate is not ‘in our power’, then by CRP, everything that follows the antecedent cause—the assent, impulse, and action—is also not ‘in our power’

Chrysippus will distinguish different types of causes. Although fate “causes” actions in one sort of way, CRP does not apply to fate because the causal efficacy of fate is limited.

Chrysippus' Response: Let's make a distinction between different 'causes'

- “Chrysippus, however, since he both rejected necessity and wanted that nothing should occur without prior causes, distinguished among the kinds of causes in order both to escape from necessity and to retain fate.” (Cicero, 384)**
- “ ‘For,’ he said, ‘some causes are perfect and principal, while others are auxiliary and proximate. Therefore, when we say that all things occur by fate by antecedent causes, we do not want the following to be understood, viz. that they occur by perfect and principal causes.’” (384)**
- In other words, fate is responsible for “auxiliary and proximate” causes, but agents are responsible for “perfect and principal” causes. Fate may contribute to an action, but agents are the primary causes of an action.**

Cylinder Analogy

“Therefore, he says, “just as he who pushed the cylinder gave it the start of its motion, he did not, however, give it its “rollability,” so a presentation which strikes will certainly impress its object and as it were stamp its form on the mind, but our assent will be in our own power and the assent, just as was said in the case of the cylinder, when struck from without, will henceforth be moved by its own force and nature. But if something were produced without an antecedent cause, then it would be false that everything occurs by fate. But if it is probable that a cause precedes all things which occur, what could block the conclusion that all things occur by fate? Let it only be understood what difference and distinction there is among causes.” (Cicero, 384)

A note about the word “cause”: *aition*, literally means *thing responsible for*
Fate is the “cause” of the “pushing” of the cylinder, but the cylinder
continues to roll and is thus responsible for its own rolling.

It is our character/mind that *assents* to the impression/proposition:

- » “so a presentation which strikes will certainly impress its object and as it were stamp its form on the mind, but our assent will be in our own power and the assent, just as was said in the case of the cylinder, when struck from without, will henceforth be moved by its own force and nature.”

It is our assent that is “in our power” or “depends on us”, thus, in having
placed something that is “in our power”, the locus of responsibility is
in the agent and not in fate.

CRP: If something, X, is causally responsible for Y, and X is not in our
power, then Y is also not in our power.